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ABSTRACT

Composition can play an important role in helping our society move away from being a "mentally handicapped" left-brained culture because composition is one of the few "bispheral" activities; left and right brain functions seem to alternate during the writing process, supplementing the insights of each other. Currently, however, most teaching of writing is postulated on the left-brained model that there is a world "out there" and another "in here" and that it is preferable to write using reason, facts, and objective quantity instead of using emotion, values, or opinions. This perspective has had a profound effect on writing as it makes invention irrelevant if truth can only be known objectively and if faith, theories, and beliefs are viewed with suspicion. The powers of words (logos) which allow us to classify and perform left-brained functions, however, are also the sources of their creative or right-brained potential. A new word opens new paths of thinking and makes us conscious of objects and concepts we could not perceive or conceive without it. As children become conscious of words and sentences through learning to write and manipulate them, they can move to higher levels of consciousness which in turn moves them away from being strictly left-brained and allows the creative, imaginative, and intuitive powers of the right hemisphere of the brain to develop. (TJ)

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AN APOLOGY FOR LOGOS

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Every time I pick up a professional journal or attend a professional meeting these days, I read or hear about the left and right hemispheres of the brain. In case anyone hasn't heard by now, according to the hemispheric model of the human brain, the left hemisphere, which controls the right side of the body, is the seat of language, the source of analytic, rational, linear thought. The right brain, on the other hand, works with holistic perceptions, gestalts, associations, imagination and intuition. Our culture, it is immediately apparent, is overwhelmingly left-brained: we turn out left-handed kids into righties; our cities are laid out in lines, squares, and rectangles; we finance scientists and starve poets.

Although left-brained thought is probably what enabled us to conquer and manipulate our environment, it may have outlived its usefulness. G. Lynn Nelson, writing in English Education, points out that "we are beginning to realize . . . that we have allowed ourselves to evolve into a mentally handicapped culture and very nearly into self-destruction." The English teacher who takes these findings seriously will, according to Nelson,

> see that it is not language (a static "product") that he is teaching, but languaging (a living "process"). And he will see that this process is inseparable from the process of life itself, from the life of the student and from his own life. He will begin to see that language cannot be isolated from emotions nor sterilized from feelings as in a scientific laboratory. (English Education, Spring, 1977, 135)

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I agree. But the hemispheric metaphor may pose a danger to the English profession, a danger from the left, so to speak, of which we ought to be aware. Less thoughtful writers than Nelson are citing the results of split-brain research to condemn, among other things, the emphasis in schools on the verbal arts, which they take to be solely left-brained functions. For example, Charles Weingartner, the educational guru of the late sixties, says in a recent article:

> American youth are moving away from conventional logic and the form in which it is most visible, written representations of language. . . . School people have virtually a total investment in left-brain functions, and are less than likely to welcome . . . (a description of) . . . what they are not doing in their myopic preoccupation with the verbal-linear-rational functions of the left brain. (Media and Methods, February, 1977, 20, 74)

Now there's a wonderful irony in Weingartner's citing the results of physiological-psychological research--that is, scientific, left-brained research--as the basis for rejecting the teaching of writing. But more serious is his assumption that writing is solely left-brained; it is not, although it is commonly taught as though it were.

Most teaching of writing now done in universities is based on current-traditional rhetorical theory, that which appears in best-selling textbooks like McCrimmon's Writing with a Purpose and the Harbrace College Handbook. Current-traditional rhetoric has for its paradigm the Cartesian-Newtonian model of the universe (since rejected by the physical sciences, I should note), which postulates a world "out there" which can be accurately measured; it has objective status, objective in the sense that the presence or absence of human beings has no influence on it. There is also a subjective world, "in here" which can be known to each individual better than any other person can ever know it; sometimes,

though, because of uncontrollable emotions, dreams, or basic drives, individuals are confused even about their own motives. This dualistic viewpoint erects a great barrier between us and our universe, each other, and ourselves, separating mind from body. A corollary of the dualism is that since we don't seem to be able to apprehend objective reality accurately or completely, there must be some flaw in the apprehending mechanism, that is, in the knower. This deficiency can be overcome, according to the paradigm, by reducing subjectivity as far as possible: the seeker for knowledge uses reason in preference to emotion, keeps judgments out of his investigation, and concentrates on empirically verifiable facts. And so we get the value-hierarchy of intellectual dichotomies which plagues us still: reason is superior to emotion; facts are superior to values or opinions; objective quantity is more reliable than subjective quality, left is better than right.

Cartesian-Newtonian mechanics also assumes that the objective world is causal and linear in its movement, that everything moves from some predetermined point to some soon-to-be-determined point. This inexorable forward movement has a first cause: the state of any system at a given time can be predicted if its original state is known. Hence, all knowledge results from causal analysis; everything can be dismantled to see how it works, even people.

The mechanical model of the universe had at least three important influences on current-traditional rhetoric. First, current-traditional rhetoric consists almost exclusively of the canons of arrangement and style. It has no theory of invention that even approaches the Classical topics in generative power and utility. Invention is irrelevant if truth can only be known objectively, that is, by empirical investigation. Thus, the office of the rhetorician is confined to coherent arrangement and presentation of what has been

found out by means external to rhetorical investigation. Current-traditional texts limit their discussion of invention, or pre-writing, as some call it, to what is more accurately called research or preparation. All that the student writer "invents" under this system is a way of assembling materials given him by others, and even here his inventive powers are limited by current-traditional rhetoric's prescriptive treatment of arrangement and style. Students in current-traditional classes produce formulaic four-part themes which are developed by comparison and contrast, examples, analogy, or other traditional methods of development. I will hazard further that the prescriptive treatment of arrangement and style stems from our efforts to ensure that by following the rules students will perforce write objectively.

The absence of a theory of invention reinforces the impact of a second mechanical influence on current-traditional rhetoric. Whole areas of discourse that were formerly the province of rhetoric are ignored, since the dualism of the mechanistic model renders rhetoric irrelevant to reasonable people and incomprehensible to the unreasonable. The model says that truth can only be determined by rigidly controlled empirical observation, aided by human reason. Thus, faith, theories, beliefs, or opinions, those things which emanate from the subjective realm, are viewed with suspicion. All questions of value, in fact, the entire traditional province of deliberative rhetoric, become secondary or unimportant. For Wayne Booth, because of the subjective-objective split,

> "wisdom" (and action guided by wisdom) no longer seems to have any connection with "eloquence." Arguments for our beliefs or actions have become "mere rhetoric" or propaganda or rationalization. Passionate commitment has lost its connection with the

> provision of good reasons. And reason has been reduced to logical calculation and proof about whatever does not matter enough to engage commitment. (Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent, Chicago, 1974, xi)

In other words, we have statements about facts, the province of science, and statements about everything else, the province of rhetoric. There is no possibility of con-sensus, no shared assumptions about values or policies. Those who do try to change minds can only be interested, like advertisers and politicians, in triumphing over an opponent. Why else engage in "mere rhetoric"?

The wisdom-eloquence dichotomy is one source, I think, of the modern tendency to separate poetry from rhetoric; poetry is personal truth, words without communication or persuasive potential. In 1940, W. H. Auden can say, in his eulogy for Yeats, that poetry "makes nothing happen." It is a "way of surviving, a mouth." Ours is the first age to think of poetry in this peculiar fashion, as purely expressive discourse.

The third important mechanical influence on rhetoric stemmed from its assumption of causality, which helped to enshrine the recording metaphor in our thinking about composing. The idea of causality supported the notion that language is the product of the mind, inevitably following after thinking; that is, thinking causes language to happen, or, alternatively, language is the record of thinking. Peter Elbow describes the recording metaphor of current-traditional rhetoric this way:

> Writing is a two-step process. First you figure out your meaning, then you put it into language. . . . First try to figure out what you want to say; don't start writing till you do; make a plan; use an outline; begin writing only afterward. Central to this model is the idea of keeping control, keeping things in hand. Don't let things wander into a mess. The commonest criticism directed at the process of writing is that you didn't clarify your thinking ahead of time; you allowed yourself to go ahead with fuzzy thinking; you allowed yourself to wander; you didn't make an outline. (Writing Without Teachers, Oxford, 1973, 15)

Although Elbow never uses the term, it is clear that, for him, the recording metaphor is based on a causal, linear model of the thought process which regards writing as entirely secondary. And, as he notes, this mechanical procedure is sure to sabotage the writing process, if, indeed, the writer ever gets it off the ground at all.

Last summer, when I read a paper exploring the relation of classical mechanics to rhetoric, a member of the audience objected that I was "confounding the two cultures"; that is, that one cannot apply the epistemological assumptions of science to the arts, or vice-versa. In answer, I argued that the epistemological assumptions of the Cartesian-Newtonian model are currently so pervasive in our thinking as to control virtually all of our expression. We accept as "true" only those "facts" which can be empirically verified; we assume that for every effect there is a cause; we abjure one another and our students to "be logical," that is, to think in a straight line from hypothesis to proof to conclusion. In short, what we think and teach is a rhetorical version of the scientific method. And it is totally left-brained.

Further, to think of "two cultures" is itself a product of the dualism of the Cartesian-Newtonian model; actually there is in Western though only one dominant culture, or cult, the cult of logocentrism. Aristotle insisted that rhetoric and dialectic are prior to physical science, in that they are sciences of the word; moreover the method of science is logic, literally, the word.

The word is the tool which at once separates us from, and provides us a means for, manipulating our environment. One of the initial functions of language must have been to name persons and objects, in order to discriminate and abstract them from their surroundings. Julian Jaynes notes that "once a tribe

member has a proper name, he can in a sense be recreated in his absence. 'He' can be thought about, using 'thought' in a special nonconscious sense of fitting into language structures."[1] Naming may be said to be the beginning of awareness of others, and of awareness of self, as discreet entities. The discriminatory aspect of language, its tendency to abstract and divide experience into manageable chunks so that it can be manipulated and seen in new relationships, is represented in our simple sentence, with its subject and predicate. The concept was formalized by Aristotle in the categories of logic; it survived into scholastic rhetoric and logic and appears in Renaissance rhetoric as the theory of places, and in Agricola's place-logic. Walter Ong notes the coincidence in the sixteenth century of the beginning of truly scientific inquiry and the first widespread use of printing. At this point in Western history, Ong says,

> the term "content," as applied to what is "in" literary productions, acquires a status which it had never known before. In lieu of merely telling the truth, books would now in common estimation "contain" truth, like boxes. (Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue, Harvard, 1958, 313)

The concept probably lies behind the current popular belief that rhetoric consists in applying a coating to truth as one applies an oak veneer to plywood. No doubt the idea of words as containers of truth is also the source of what I. A. Richards called the Proper Meaning Superstition, the idea that words have a proper--usually only one--meaning, and are relatively uninfluenced by the context in which they appear. My students, at least, seem to hold this static notion of language.

It is logos, itself, then, the eternal classifier, which seduces us into creating distinctions between science and art, subject and object, emotion and

logic, wisdom and eloquence, style and content, technical and creative writing, and on and on and on. This feature of language is at once its power and its limitation.

The strange thing about all this is that at least one manifestation of the word, writing, is not solely analytic or left-brained. All accounts of the composition process that I have encountered include a stage in which the writer intuits or grasps the whole, or has an illumination in some non-linguistic fashion. Left- and right-brain functions seem to alternate freely in the process, each supplementing the insights of the other; this is possible because of the potential for revision, literally "re-seeing," that writing affords. As I noted above, current-traditional rhetoric assumes that the composition process is linear, moving in an orderly fashion from pre-writing through writing to rewriting. It also adopts the recording metaphor, nicely illustrated by Weingartner in the article quoted earlier: "As linguists have long noted, speech is language; writing is a symbolic representation of language, and in English at least, not a very good one at that" (20). But writing is not simply recorded speech. For one thing, speech is linear in time, but not in space. Writing is linear in space, but probably not in time, at least not during the composing process. It is also important to note in this context that for the first 1200 years of its existence, writing was probably independent of speech; it was not until the invention of phonetic writing that the two were necessarily associated. Ignace Gelb, in his Study of Writing, says that

> many persons can read visually without an intermediary flow of speech signs. . . . The symbolism of visual images in the earliest stages of writing, like that of gesture signs, can express meaning without the necessity of a linguistic garment. (Chicago, 1963, 10)

And, paradoxically, the same abstractive powers of language that cause us to discriminate and classify are the sources of its creative potential. The acquisition of a new word gives the perceiver a hold on a whole new series of referents; a new word makes us conscious of objects and concepts we could not perceive or conceive without it. According to Jaynes, "All of these concrete metaphors increase enormously our powers of perception of the world about us and our understanding of it, and literally create new objects. Indeed, language is an organ of perception, not simply a means of communication" (50). Consciousness itself, according to Jaynes, may have been "created" by us in just this way. That is, we are now self-conscious because language gives us the power to think about ourselves perceiving new objects and relations between objects, or, to create new realities.

Lev Vygotsky argues the inseparability of language and thought in this way:

> A word does not refer to a single object but to a group or to a class of objects. Each word is therefore already a generalization. Generalization is a verbal act of thought and reflects reality in quite another way than sensation and perception reflect it. . . . There is every reason to suppose that the qualitative distinction between sensation and thought is the presence in the latter of a generalized reflection of reality, which is also the essence of word meaning. (Thought and Language, M. I. T., 1962, 5)

Children, according to Vygotsky, must become conscious of systems before they can utilize them; when they have mastered a new concept, it changes their whole outlook--they have new ways of seeing and using old concepts as well. The process of growth in children, then, consists in their generalizing older generalizations, which is the same process that language is. Language, then, is

probably the most important mode of learning--if learning means becoming conscious of more and more versions of reality and, as a consequence, becoming capable of manipulating reality.

Writing, of course, makes thought conscious, just as most languageing does; but it demands that thought be more fully realized than it is in internal or external speech. According to Vygotsky, writing is a highly abstractive activity, since there is no actual hearer as there is in speech. Thus, the writer must play all the roles of a real speech situation, which demands that he abstract the situation from reality. Further, when the child becomes conscious of sentences, say, through learning how to write them, he can then manipulate sentences in ways that help him to move to higher levels of consciousness. In other words, to write is to create and expand consciousness in a special way. Putting pen to paper is a problem-solving process.

Further, according to Janet Emig,

> Writing involves the fullest possible functioning of the brain, which entails the active participation in the process of both the left and the right hemispheres. . . . The right hemisphere . . . seems to make at least three, perhaps four, major contributions to the writing process. ("Writing as a Mode of Learning," CCC, May, 1977, 125)

Writing, then, poses a unique solution to the problems of our left-brained culture. As one of the few bi-spheral activities available to most of us, writing can help us to become fuller human beings. But as teachers of writing, we cannot continue to confuse writing with current-traditional rhetoric. Nor can we revert to the touchy-feely teaching of the sixties in order to restore the right brain to equality with the left. I'd hate to see us lose our reverence for logos; in any case, we can't reject it. Most Westerners, especially

English teachers, live by the word. Perhaps we can learn, though, as early humans did, to alter our consciousness by means of the word. Maybe we can write ourselves into a newly integrated understanding of ourselves and our world.

ENDNOTE

1. Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1976), 136.